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AUTHOR Glenn, Terrence J.; Rahmes, Catherine M.  
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## ABSTRACT

In summer 1994, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) conducted a focused evaluation visit of Cincinnati Technical College (CTC) in Ohio to evaluate the degree of success of CTC's administrative structure and governance model, review the college's assessment plan, and review CTC's request for institutional change in status from a technical college to a comprehensive community college. The focused evaluation report required by the NCA was prepared with the participation of the college's Long-Range Planning Committee and broad involvement of the college community. The report described progress related to three concerns raised by a previous accreditation team: (1) the effectiveness of the administrative structure and governance model, citing evidence of improved methods for reviewing program curricula, setting annual budgets, and facilities planning; (2) the lack of coordination of general institutional planning, describing the establishment of the Long Range Planning Committee to coordinate planning; and (3) the inadequacy of facility allocations for student services, pointing to new equipment, an integrated computer system, and a 60% increase in space. With respect to the change from a technical to a community college and corresponding addition of two associate degree programs, the state Board of Trustees had conducted a 2-year review which resulted in favor of the conversion. The focus visit lasted 2 days, at the end of which it was concluded that progress had been made in the areas of governance and administration and the request for institutional change was approved. (TGI)

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# USING A FOCUSED VISIT TO ITS BEST ADVANTAGE

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TERRENCE J. GLENN  
CATHERINE M. RAHMES  
CINCINNATI STATE TECHNICAL  
AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

PRECONFERENCE WORKSHOP  
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## USING A FOCUSED VISIT TO ITS BEST ADVANTAGE

In July, 1994, the NCA conducted a Focused Evaluation of Cincinnati Technical College, the result of the Commission's 1991 action, which continued the College's accreditation for ten years but required a focused evaluation in 1994-95. The reason for the visit was to evaluate the degree of success of the administrative structure and governance model of the College. In addition, the site visitors were requested to review the College's Preliminary Assessment Plan and also the College's request for institutional change in status from a technical college to a comprehensive community college, which involved the addition of the Associate of Arts and the Associate of Science degrees.

### Rationale for Multi-Purpose Visit

When the site visitors conducted the comprehensive evaluation in February 1991, they found a college in transition. The new president had been in office only a little over a year. During that period of time, the first collective bargaining agreement between the College and the faculty had been reached, although it had not been fully implemented.

The multi-purpose visit was a result of the expanded requirements of the Commission and the desire of the institution to broaden its mission. First and foremost, the College was required to report on the progress that had been made on the area of focus, namely the degree of success of the administrative structure and the governance model. The second purpose was again a requirement and that was to present the College's assessment plan. The final purpose of the visit was a desire of the College to add the degrees of associate of arts and associate of science.

The College was advised by its liaison officer that a change of this type would require a site visit. During the 1994 annual NCA convention, the staff liaison, Dr. Stephen Spangehl, and the self-study coordinator sat down and discussed a strategy that would address all three purposes. Dr. Spangehl proposed moving the scheduled focus visit forward from February, 1995 to the summer of 1994. By moving the dates forward, the College would be allowed to begin to offer the new degrees in the fall of 1994 as planned. Dr. Spangehl offered his assistance in rescheduling the visit and his assurance that he could assemble a team of consultant-evaluators who could help accomplish all three facets of the visit. It was through the cooperation of the Commission, the site visitors, and the College, that Cincinnati State Technical and Community College was able to use its focused evaluation visit to its best advantage and accomplish all three purposes.

### Organization of the Steering Committee

The focused evaluation report required by the Commission was prepared with the participation and support of the College's Long-Range Planning Committee. The Long-Range Planning Committee is a twelve-

member committee which includes a trustee, the College president, other representatives of the administration, the Faculty Senate president, the president of the local chapter of the AAUP, the representatives of the contractual and hourly staff, and a person representing student interests. It acted as the steering committee for the report preparation and for the site visit arrangements.

Prior to its role in the focus visit preparation, the Long-Range Planning Committee had produced three planning documents. It published the College's long-range plan which was entitled *The Plan for 1993-98*. It had also provided the leadership role in preparing the documents required by the Ohio Board of Regents for the conversion to a community college status, namely *A Proposal for Change of Status of Cincinnati Technical College* and *The Operating Plan for the Cincinnati State Technical And Community College*. The *Operating Plan* provided the foundation of the request for institutional change required by the Commission. The Assessment Plan was prepared by a task force appointed by the Long-Range Planning Committee

### Approach to Focused Evaluation

The approach used by the College was to gain broad involvement in the review process by relying on the Long-Range Planning Committee members to inform and involve their constituents. The chairman of the Long-Range Planning Committee defined the committee role as follows. The committee would review the drafts of the focused evaluation report as prepared by the chairman. The drafts would include wherever possible elements from existing documents, especially those which had been prepared for conversion to the community college. The committee members would circulate the drafts to their constituents and provide feedback based upon the reactions they received. They would approve the final version of the report. They would establish whatever subcommittees needed to make the necessary arrangements for the visit. They would help set up the Resource Room and collect the minutes of the various standing committees. They would also suggest and provide other supportive materials. They would meet collectively with the visitors and on an individual basis as appropriate.

### Responses To The Site Team's Concerns And Recommendations

The site visit team that conducted the last comprehensive review for continued accreditation listed three concerns.

**Concern Number 1:** The administrative structure and governance model recently instituted in an attempt to resolve ongoing problems related to these areas, while holding promise, is yet untested by time or significant events.

**Progress:** The "advise and consent" process has worked effectively at Cincinnati Technical College through faculty, staff, and student involvement in the committee system. Some examples are listed below:

- **Academic Policies and Curriculum Committee**—The Committee annually reviews all program curricula for sequencing of courses, prerequisites, lecture/lab hour ratios, credit hour requirements, and course descriptions.
- **Smoking Policy**—Working with employee and student groups, the administration recommended the Board adopt a policy which has worked well ever since.
- **Annual Budget Development**—During his first year in office, President Long required that the Budget Advisory Committee do an exhaustive study of all requests for funds in the spirit of zero-based budgeting. This review resulted in a process for distributing resources fairly.
- **Facilities Planning Committee**—This committee annually makes recommendations in such potentially divisive areas as which programs get capital equipment money from setaside funds, which units get additional space, and which units get higher priorities for requests for State capital dollars.
- **Faculty/Administration Communication Team**—Early in its existence, the FACT was charged with resolving two grievances involving basic tenets of the negotiated contract, specifically workload and overload pay. The committee resolved the issues and recommended changes to the contract which were approved by the association membership and the College's Board of Trustees. Additional issues discussed and resolved included the individual contracts for members of the bargaining unit and academic advising concerns.
- **Conversion to Community College**—The best example of cooperation was the process to decide whether or not to convert to a community college. The Board involved all constituencies in the two-year long discussion before reaching its decision in favor of the conversion.

**Concern Number 2:** The general institutional planning, evaluation, goal setting, goal prioritizing, and budget development processes do not represent a coordinated, integrated effort.

**Progress:** The president established the Long-Range Planning Committee in March, 1991. The Long-Range Planning Committee accepted the charge of producing a five-year plan and designed a process that would provide for broad-based input into the development of the goals of the institution. Its two-year long development process also allowed time for feedback and refinement opportunities. In February 1993, the committee issued *The Plan for 1993-98*. Annual goal setting is integrated into the budget-building process and the performance evaluation process.

**Concern Number 3:** Facility allocations for the student services are inadequate and are not nearly on the par with that allocated for the educational programs.

**Progress:** Capital improvements have been made to the student services areas of the College. A comparison of the various offices and their square footages in 1990 versus 1994 shows that the allotted space increased over 60 percent from 5,060 square feet to 8,680 square feet. In addition to the remodeled and expanded areas, the student services offices have been provided with new furniture, equipment, and an integrated computer system. Investment in renovations and equipment was nearly \$2 million. The College also has these general use areas available for student activities and athletics: gym, pool, game room, weight room, and television room. The space devoted to these activities is 28,016 square feet.

### Request for Institutional Change

Over the past five years, the state of Ohio has been encouraging technical colleges to become community colleges in order to provide more affordable access to higher education in the state. Since this initiative was not mandated, some technical colleges have chosen to remain technical only, while others have expanded their missions. The decision whether to make an institutional change was especially difficult for Cincinnati Technical College for several reasons: (1) the Cincinnati area has a number of colleges and universities which provide access to higher education; (2) the College has enjoyed a strong reputation as a technical college and therefore has fulfilled a special "niche" in higher education in Cincinnati; (3) the co-operative education component of the technical degrees has made many of the College's programs unique in the state; (4) because the College is a close-knit institution, it was imperative that the College community support the change of mission.

Because of these concerns, the College undertook a study to determine the viability of this change in mission. The study included examining both internal and external factors in a variety of methods including public hearings, surveys, feasibility studies, and budget analyses. Although the process took close to two years, the final decision to request an institutional change was better publicized and accepted than it might have been had a decision been made more quickly.

### The Relationship of the Proposed Change to the NCA Comprehensive Visit

The addition of two new associate degrees will capitalize on strengths and address two of the concerns of the last comprehensive evaluation visitors. The first strength listed was the educational programs. These new degrees were developed using the same processes as those used for the College's other degree programs. The second strength was the cooperative education component of the curricula. The new degrees will incorporate cooperative education experiences as an integral part of the programs. Few transfer programs contain the work experience levels that are included in the proposed new degrees. The third strength listed was the breadth of the instructional equipment. The planning process that was used in developing the new degrees has included the identification of the laboratory equipment necessary to operate the programs, and the costs to purchase the equipment were



included in the estimates of expenditures. The fourth strength identified by the site visitors was the sound financial condition of the College. The financial planning that has been used to balance the College's annual budget has been incorporated in the planning for the new degrees. The fifth and final strength listed was the dedication of all of the components of the College to the quality of the educational programs. The same dedication as was found previously has been exhibited in the development of the new degrees. Also, the areas the site visitors identified for improvement included increased access, transferability of credits, and assessment. The new programs addressed the first two concerns and the assessment plan was validated by the visiting team.

### The College's Ability to Continue to Meet Criteria for Accreditation

The Board of Trustees thoroughly studied the anticipated effects of the change of status from a technical college to a community college during its two-year review of the issue. To summarize the significant amount of data that had been accumulated during the study, the Board hired a consultant. The consultant identified eight major factors that would be affected by this change: (1) assessment of student need; (2) impact of Board of Regents/Ohio Law; (3) impact on curriculum and faculty; (4) impact on co-op program; (5) impact on college name and image; (6) impact on Board of Trustees; (7) impact on other area colleges and universities; and (8) impact on budget and enrollment. A careful analysis of these factors convinced the Board and the College community that the conversion was feasible. The NCA accreditation factors affected have been planned for and build on the success of the technical programs. The most notable change in requirements for accreditation is that the institution include documentation of students' academic achievement. The newly-formed Assessment Task Force will ensure this criterion is met, both for the technical and the transfer programs.

### The Site Visit

The site visit was scheduled for two days with a three-member team. Arrangements for the site visit were coordinated by the chair of the visiting team with the local assistance of the self-study coordinator. The chair developed a schedule composed of individual and group meetings. When the team arrived on campus, they met first with the president of the College. Then there were three open sessions scheduled. Each was devoted to a separate area: governance and administration, assessment, and institutional change. Notices of the open sessions were distributed to the College with special invitations being offered to appropriate groups and individuals. Each member of the team was responsible for one of the three areas. A luncheon meeting was held with members of the Long-Range Planning Committee and members of the College's Board of Trustees. While no formal agenda was followed, the visiting team took the opportunity to ask questions about their respective areas of responsibility.

There were also individual meetings both scheduled and unscheduled. Team members scheduled meetings with officers of the College in whose area of responsibility they were interested. They also met with leaders of the Faculty Senate and with the faculty union president. The members made

themselves available for drop in visits in the Resource Room, and a number of discussions did take place.

The focus visit was concluded on the second day in an exit interview. At the exit interview, the chair reported on the findings of the team. The results were very positive. The team concluded that progress had been made in the area of governance and administration, although there were still some challenges ahead. The assessment plan was approved. Some very helpful suggestions to improve the plan were offered. The request for institutional change was approved. The team found that the College had the resources to make and sustain the change in mission. The team concluded that the College could continue to meet the criteria for affiliation with the Commission. No reports were required nor further visits until the next comprehensive visit in 2000-01. The Commission voted to approve the change of status at its meeting November 2-5, 1994.

A number of items still lie ahead for the College. The College needs to revise its Assessment Plan to incorporate the suggestions of the site visitors. It also needs to implement the Assessment Plan over the next three years. A schedule for implementation was included in the Plan. Finally, the College needs to monitor its performance in preparation for the next comprehensive visit in 2000-01.

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